

OPTIONS
Employment & Educational Services, LLC

Testimony Concerning

H.B. 5447:

**AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE
AUDITORS OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS CONCERNING PRIVATE
PROVIDERS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION.**

March 13, 2018

Chairman Fleischmann, Chairwoman Slossberg, Chairwoman Boucher, Ranking Member Lavielle and esteemed members of the Education Committee

This testimony is submitted on behalf of myself, Scott Wells, director of Options Employment and Educational Services (Options) and The Center for Advocacy Research and Education of Connecticut, Inc. (CARE). I have provided clinical, educational, vocational rehabilitation and advocacy services to high school age special education students for 25+ years. I have a Master's degree in counseling psychology and have collaborated with and managed a variety of disciplines while administering clinical, educational and transitional services to students and adults with disabilities. I am also a recipient of The Center for Children's Advocacy, 2016 Champion of Children's Award. I have dedicated my professional career and values to helping children and youth with disabilities participate as competitive contributing members of our communities.

Options Educational Services and Options Transitional Services are both CSDE approved / private programs that provide individualized educational services to local school districts special education identified students.

Options provides a unique model of educational and vocational habilitation and rehabilitation services. Through this model we help injured, traumatized and/or disabled youth reestablish their natural course of development, as well as, help them learn about their disabilities and mitigate or eliminate the effects of negative symptoms on their developing young lives.

We serve some of the most at risk children and youth from across the region and beyond and firmly believe our communities are better and safer by helping care for, train and assimilate our students within their communities. We believe it is of the utmost importance to engage students in positive ego building relations with others and their communities to ensure their best chance of success.

My colleagues and I regularly provide services to students experiencing emotional disturbance, autism, neurological and other disorders. Our student population is diverse. Some students live with family, while others may have no family, some students may be from affluent towns while some students may be homeless. They all have in common a desire to do better. **For those reasons, I cannot support Section 2 of H.B. 5447 as it will significantly impact our ability to provide the services the way we currently do for our students.**

Section 2 of H.B. 5447

Section 2 of H.B. 5447 which develops a rate schedule for the amount or range of amounts that may be charged by a private provider of special education service must be abandoned.

Establishing a standardized rate will significantly hamper or eliminate the ability of private providers like Options to individualize services and provide interventions and accommodations for at-risk special education students. It will limit access to specialized programs to allow for a free and appropriate education that will successfully prepare students for transition to post-secondary self-sufficiency.

Students have the right to an education that establishes services specific to their disability related needs and not determined by previously established availability or cost of services.

Currently there exist 66 Connecticut State Department of Education approved special education programs. http://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Special-Education/Priv_SpEd_Progs.pdf?la=en.

These programs have been developed over a number of years. These programs fulfill a demand for specialized services that are beyond the capacity of our local school districts to provide. These programs provide essential services, interventions, modifications and accommodations for students to access their education.

Just as students' needs and presentations of a disability are different, many approved programs differ in budget, philosophy, service application and styles. The successful programs are organized and services are determined by a students' individual needs and implemented by professional educators and treatment providers.

Just as students' needs differ and program models differ so do costs of developing and maintaining programs that meet the individual needs of students. Standardizing rates will directly result in decreasing the effectiveness and variety of programs which currently meet a diverse group of students' with disabilities.

Meeting the needs of each of these individual students is of a first and foremost importance to programs like Options. A special education student's post high school success is directly correlated with the ability to program for their needs in high school.

This ability will be hampered by standardizing our cost.

Youth with unmet needs and poorly developed abilities to manage the transition to adult roles have increased incidences of poverty, dependency on state welfare, criminal arrests and violence toward themselves and others.

This is a time for advocacy to ensure all special education students are receiving required services to support their transition to adult roles, not a time to support legislation which will decrease options to address students' needs.

For these reasons, I strongly oppose the passage of Section 2 of HB 5447.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Scott Wells MA , CESP
Director